

Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat *Incorporated*

MAY 1995

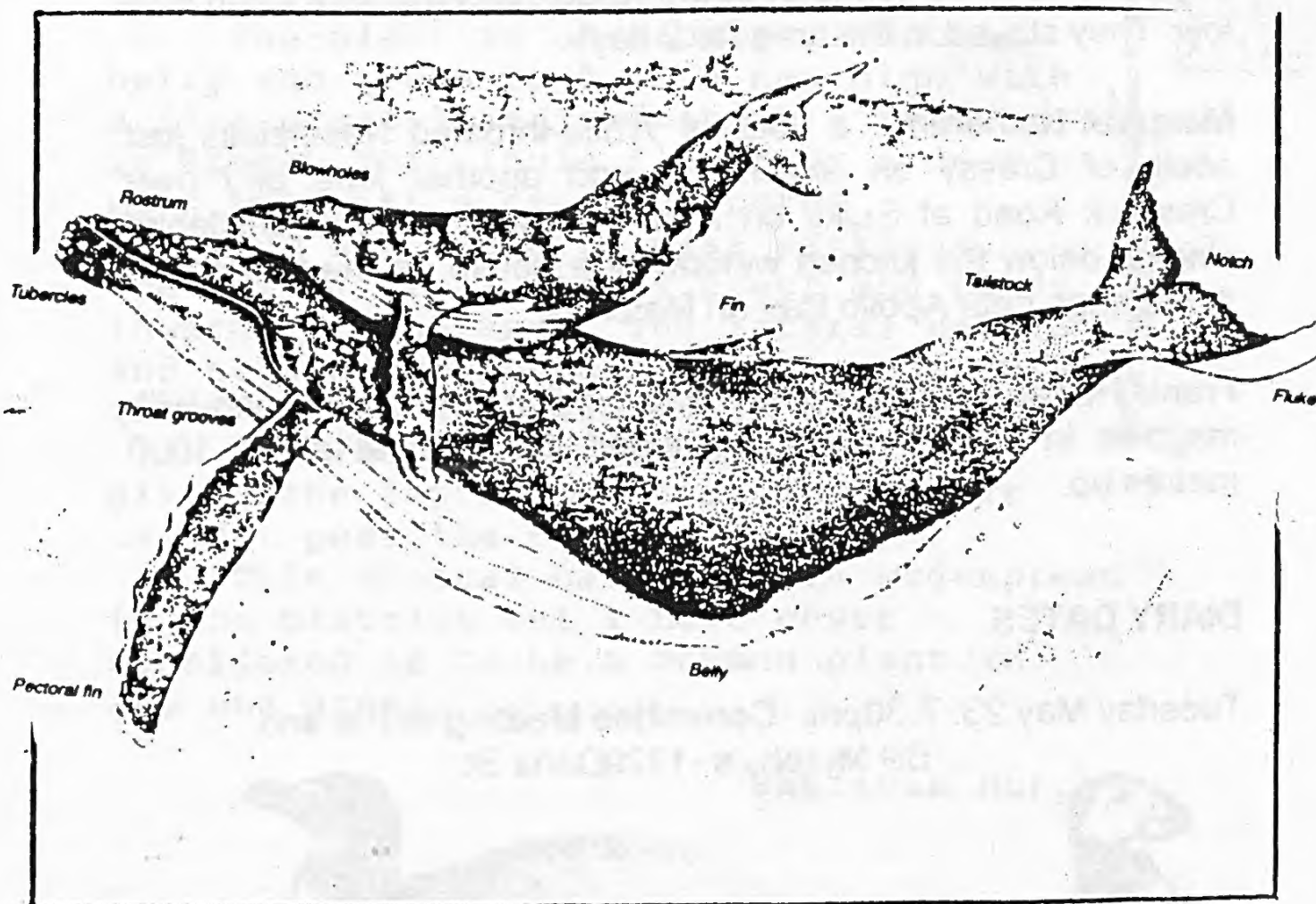
EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

Meeting May 5 Dr F Harrap: Humpback Whales, Fraser Island

Meeting June 2 Mr P Prevett: Small Mammals and Platypus

Excursion May 7 Mt Mercer/Dereel: Mrs P Murphy

**Excursion June 4 Ballarat Wildlife Park; Mrs S Davison
(Childrens Excursion - Half day)**



President: Mr J Gregurke
Secretary: Mr L Fink
Treasurer: Mr G Binns
Editor: Mr A Dyson

PO Box 328W, Ballarat West 3350

MEETINGS are held at the School of
Mines & Industries, Art Building,
Lydiard St. Sth., 7.30 pm.
EXCURSIONS start at "Book City",
cnr. Sturt and Armstrong Sts. 9.30 am.
(full day outings) or 1.30 pm (half day)

Field Reports - April Meeting

Ken Hammond and Lyndsay Fink - on a visit to Wilsons Promontory - Ground Parrots with their long tails and striking green plumage. Also Southern Emu-wren and the rare Hog Deer.

John Stayt - on a recent trip to SE Asia - no sightings of birds (even at rubbish tips). The only birds seen were birds in cages (such as Galahs, Crimson Rosellas, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and King Parrots) in the markets. Margaret Rotheram reported that she had also noticed this when in Thailand.

Alan Morrison - at Lake Wendouree - Pink-eared Ducks, Hardheads, Grey Teal and both Spotless and Spotted Crakes.

Ken McDonnell - at Invermay in early March - Grey Goshawk and a flock of 40 to 50 White-throated Needletails (Swifts), flying very low. They stayed in the area for 2 days.

Margaret Rotheram - a flock of White-throated Needletails just south of Cressy on March 17, and another lone bird over Creswick Road at Sulky on April 2. Also a Rufous Bristlebird singing below the kitchen window of a house on the beachfront at Marengo near Apollo Bay on March 24.

Frank Harrap - Wedge-tailed eagle flying over Buninyong with magpies in pursuit. Frank estimated the flight at about 1000 metres up.

DIARY DATES

Tuesday May 23: 7.30pm. Committee Meeting at Pat and Bill Murphy's -



ORCHIDS of the BALLARAT DISTRICT

No. 19 of a series

Scientific Name : *Caladenia pusilla*
(syn. *C. carnea* var. *pygmaea*)
pusillus = tiny, puny.

Common Name : Tiny caladenia

Flowering time : October to November

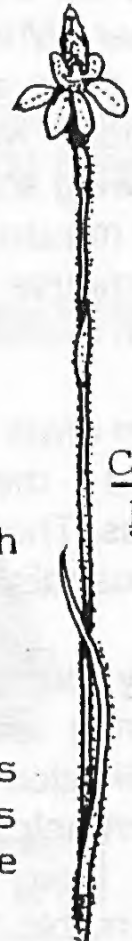
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This small orchid can be found in either our peppermint/stringybark lightly forested areas or in more open situations amidst heathland type vegetation .

The plant is obviously glandular hairy and grows to 8 or 9 cms high with a fine grass-like leaf about 5 to 6cms in length. The single flower is a deep pink but with a cream coloured labellum and red crosswise markings. The dorsal sepal stands erect and bends inwards at the apex. The lateral petals and sepals are rounded at the ends, are gland dotted and relatively broad.

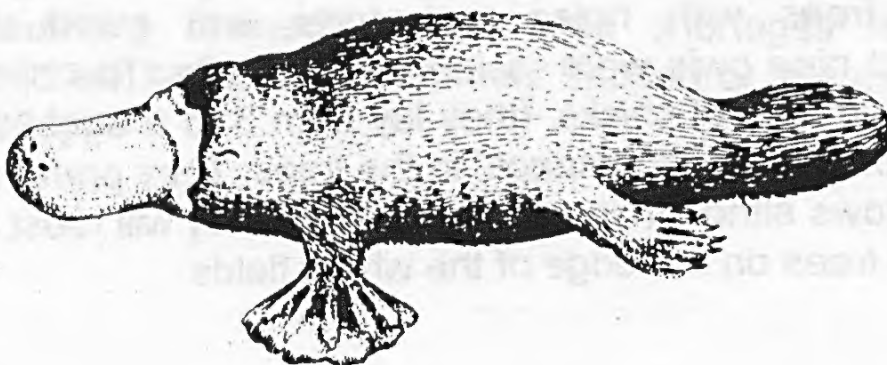
The flowers seldom open fully, giving the impression that the flower is just past the bud stage.

This unusual caladenia is widespread in the district but I have never considered it to be a common plant in any one area.



Caladenia
pusilla

Patricia Murphy



BARN OWLS - Dr John McLaughlin

John spoke on this subject at our April meeting.

John is associated with the Zoology Department of the La Trobe University and has also done work with the RAOU. The RAOU project used funding under an "endangered species program" and he did a special study in the Mallee on the Black-eared Miner. While doing this work he did thesis work on Barn Owls in the same area. His main areas of interest were - the relationship of Barn Owls and mice, and - the foraging of Barn Owls in wheat growing areas. Earlier work done by the CSIRO indicated that at low mouse populations owls do have some controlling influence on mouse numbers but at high levels owls have no influence. John predicted his findings would be similar.

Barn Owls have one of the broadest distributions of birds in the world - they appear to be present in nearly all but very cold areas. There are 35 described sub-species. They are widespread in Australia.

They display several interesting adaptations - the sense of hearing is aided by ears asymmetrically on the head aiding localisation of sound. The feathers around the head are very stiff which helps to pick up very faint noise. The plumage is very soft and their flight is consequently very quiet. They have a reversible toe with serrated middle claws aiding the catching and eating of prey.

The study area was based at Walpeup near Ouyen in the Victorian Mallee. John started his study by having to monitor the mouse population, the owl population and to establish what the owls were eating and how much they were eating.

John checked potential sites during the day and again at night. He noted all trees with holes and splits and eventually established that nine owls were resident on the site. The birds produce large numbers of chicks, (they lay from 3 to 9 eggs) so they need a lot of nesting "floorspace" in the trees. They prefer to roost in tree hollows although in warmer weather they will roost in dense foliage in trees on the edge of the wheat fields.

He established that in these wheatfields there were no real potential food supplies apart from mice. By checking mice traps he found, for example, that the mice population from November to December in 1987 was high with a big drop in numbers in the winter of 1988 when conditions were extremely cold. Constant checking confirmed that the breeding of the owls increased during the times of high mouse populations, but the mouse population did not seem to be influenced by the increasing number of predators.

John was satisfied by the end of his research that the outcome did fit his prediction that the number of Barn Owls had no major influence on the population of the mice.

Our thanks to him for an informative evening. Many questions were still being asked during our supper break.

VD



News from other clubs

Birds in Iraq.

The GFNC Monthly News (No. 8 April 1995) gives an interesting account of a meeting addressed by Khalid Alderbagh. He is an ornithologist currently working with the RAOU. Until 1992 he was one of the few professionals studying birds in his native Iraq.

The report shows Iraq as being a traditional home for a wide species of birds - particularly wetland birds. Various groups, such as Bird Life International have recognised the huge conservation significance of the bird population of the country.

In Iraq today all birds are in danger - the meeting heard of wetlands being drained, human food shortages leading to slaughtering of birds, no government support or interest is given ... a tragic tale.

VD

Adopt a Plant Scheme - DCNR

Report on Threatened Plant Protection Project

(Copy of part of a report on this scheme done by Greg Binns for the DCNR. The report is dated 20 March 1995)

Extremely dry conditions during the summer of 1994-95 have created testing conditions for the plants, particularly at the Bullarook and Creswick Creek "Snizort" sites. Hand watering has not been continued beyond the first summer following each planting. In spite of this the general survival rate has been gratifying. Weed control and maintenance had been carried out during visits to all sites.

The Projects:

Lepidium hyssopifolium - Water Board Reserve, Bullarook

At this site, inspection and weeding during February 1995 revealed a count of 14 surviving plants, 13 in one plot and 1 in another. The latter has proved to be a much drier area. Some plants are up to .75m in height and were seeding heavily. Work has had to be carried out to combat heavy infestations of Teazle and Hemlock plants on this site.

Discaria pubescens

Site 1 - Lal Lal Creek, Lal Lal

In February 1995, 50 healthy plants were sighted. Strong growth of Poa grasses is tending to cover yet protect the Anchor Plants here. Repairs to the fence of the reserve, damaged by cattle, have been carried out.

Site 2 - Creswick Creek "Snizort"

In February 1995, 13 plants were tended - some requiring further protection against hares. The plants generally show stress from drought conditions on this high bank and have had tips of branches eaten by animals. This property has changed hands and the new owners are sympathetic towards the project, and the presence of the reserve within the property.

Site 3 - Bailey's Creek, Chepstowe

These plants continue to progress, without further loss.

Site 4 - "Mooramong", via Skipton

These plants also continue to progress and protective guards have been removed.

NOTE: Although flowering and seeding has taken place at all the project sites regeneration has not yet been detected.

(Greg submitted the report to DCNR with about 20 photographs of plants and of several hard working FNCB members at the various sites.)



Vegetation Protection

Jamie Pittock, Conservation Officer, WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) has written an article on this subject in the WWF journal for March - May 1995. He notes -

Australia is one of the world's greatest destroyer of native vegetation, clearing an estimated 664,000 ha per year - an area larger than Kosciusko National Park cleared annually.

Vegetation clearing is responsible for the extinction of flora and fauna, of expanding land degradation and for nearly a quarter of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. The clearing and burning of bush release gases as the plants and organic material in the soil breaks down.

In 1991 the Commonwealth and State Governments, the National Farmers Federation and many conservation groups agreed that controls on clearing were essential. In 1985 South Australia had already implemented responsible protection legislation. Five state and territory governments have failed to honour their commitments. In NSW and Queensland, where 90% of the bush being cleared is destroyed, the governments have a particular responsibility to reform administration.

(Thanks to Helen Burgess for providing the WWF article)

Australian Mammals Found In The Ballarat Area. 3

Sheathtail Bats. Family Emballonuridae.

There is thirteen Genera distributed between S. America, Africa, Southern Asia, australia and New Guinea. The widespread Taphozus is the only genus represented in Australia. There are seven members of Taphozus in Australia.

Yellow Sheathtail Bat. Tappozus flaviventris
Order Chiroptera. Suborder Microchiroptera.
Family Emballonuridae.

The contrast between the black surface and yellowish belly of this bat distinguishes it from all other species. It is widespread over Australia and it's apparent rarity is due no doubt, to it's flying so high that it is seldom collected.

Usually found in tree hollows in colonies of less than 10 individuals, it has been found in abandoned nests, single ones when found, are sometimes exhausted and usually migrating to warmer areas, it is rare in it's widespread habitat, there are no subspecies.

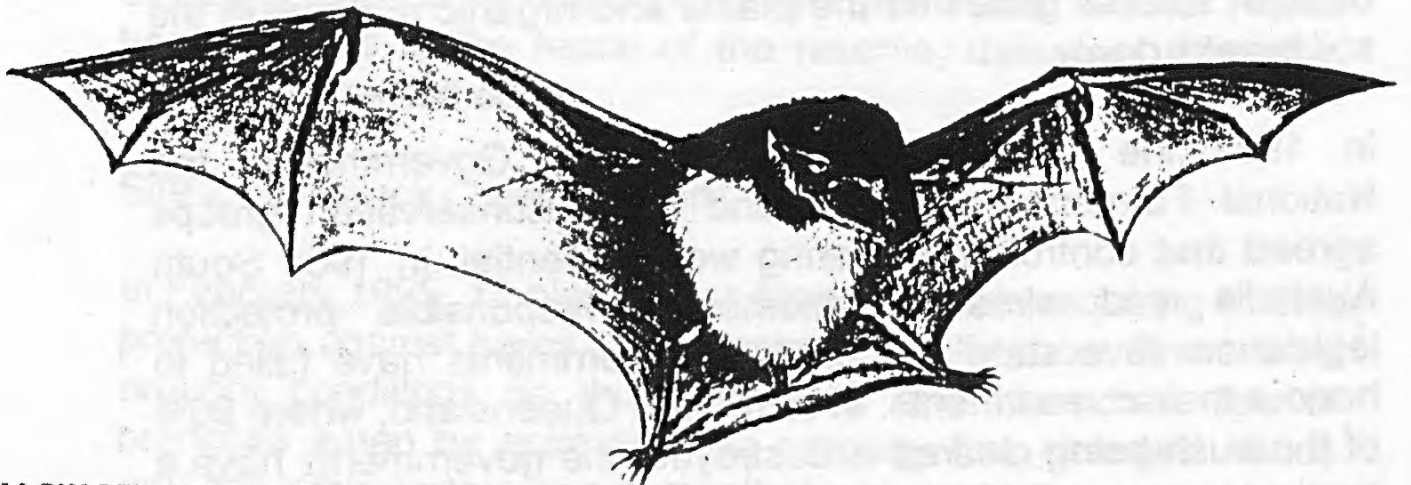
Although it's territory extends to the Ballarat area it would almost never be seen.

Mastiff Bats. Family Molossidae.

This family contains 12 genera and 80 species and is represented on every continent.

Three Genera Tadarida, Mormopteris, and Chaeroplion are represented in Australia by 6 species.

Elfin



YELLOW-BELLIED SHEATHTAIL-BAT